

Headquarters Military Traffic Management Command

News Release

MTMC Command Affairs Office

200 Stovall St., Room 11N57

Alexandria, VA 22332

Voice (703) 428-2464 e-mail: randtj@mtmc.army.mil

For more information, contact: John Randt



No. 061-2001

May 22, 2001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Black Sea port provides MTMC many advantages

By Lt. Col. Gary R. Stanley

Commander, 839th Transportation Battalion

&

Bram de Jong

Command Affairs Officer, 598th Transportation Group

The trio of ships which sailed from Beaumont, Texas, in America's heartland, had a destination a half a world away: Bourgas, Bulgaria, on the Black Sea.

It had been a long trip. The ships traveled 6,675 nautical miles.

The distant location has unique attributes for the American military and the peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo.

Use of the Bourgas port provides us with another entry into the Balkans. In addition, the use of Bulgarian military and civilian personnel reduces the size of the American port presence. We did a successful load out in February. Now, a regular discharge is scheduled.

The first ship to arrive was the MV Merlin on April 30. The MV Project Arabia arrived May 7 and the MV Scanderborg on May 8.

The equipment comes from several Army units. For this operation, they are headquartered by the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) of Fort Campbell, Ky. This is the first time the majority of an American peacekeeping force to Kosovo has come from the U.S.

Discharge was accomplished by our port operator, the 953rd Transportation Co., Piraeus, Greece. The ships were unloaded by a mix of contracted Bulgarian labor and American military equipment operators.

Our biggest challenge for us was training the Bulgarians to our methods and equipment. We had to maintain positive control on every aspect of the operation. We had language and cultural challenges.

“It is very challenging conducting port operations in Bourgas, Bulgaria,” said George Kokonos, Terminal Manager, 953rd Transportation Co.

“The port stevedores don’t have the experience in handling U.S. military equipment and our techniques for lifting vehicles and lashing them to rail cars. It took a couple of days before they understood that this was not Russian equipment.”

Our use of a large, experienced deployment support team helped the process. In the end, we both learned from each other and things were very efficient by discharge of the last ship.

“This has been a fast indoctrination into MTMC, said Sgt. 1st Class Terry Allen, a marine cargo specialist with the 953rd Transportation Co.

“The image some people have of MTMC as being in exotic lands holed up in a hotel could not be farther from the truth. We work and live side-by-side with the warfighter in places I could never have imagined being when I joined the Army.”

Sgt. 1st Class Delenor Wilson, a marine cargo specialist with the 839th Transportation Battalion, Livorno, Italy, agrees.

“I am deployed many times,” said Wilson. “No deployment is the same – each one is different ... the common goal is to complete the mission. Generally good people here, you can overcome the language barrier with sign language.

The work on the Black Sea was another whistle stop for Michael Pittas, system administrator/shipment clerk with the 953rd Transportation Co.

“It is just another temporary duty for us in the documentation world,” said Pittas. “The work is the same whether it is Greece, Bulgaria, Albania or one of a dozen other ports we might find ourselves in.

“Different faces, and different places, and new challenges to overcome.”

The 14th Movements Control Team, Livorno, Italy, handled the onward movement by rail of supplies and equipment from the port to Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia. That is where American soldiers fell in on their vehicles for the motor movement to Kosovo.

It was another story for the helicopters. Military and contract personnel under the supervision of the 2/502 Aviation Battalion, Mannheim, Germany, reassembled the helicopters. The helicopters were then flown under their own power into Kosovo.

After several port actions on the Black Sea, we are now calling our temporary port organization Task Force Bourgas. We work with the Military Sealift Command and, of course, the 29th Area Support Group, Kaiserslautern, Germany. The latter handles housing, meals and force protection.

“Bourgas provides the Army with another choice in the Balkan Area of Operations,” said Lt. Col. Tom Boyle, Task Force Commander.

“It provides us the flexibility and an opportunity to have multiple choices in how we deploy and redeploy forces to and from Kosovo.”

(CAPTIONS)

TrafficManagement:

Sgt. 1st Class Jorge Vazquez guides equipment in the staging area.

Project Arabia:

Vehicle is discharged from the Project Arabia.